U.S. COPYRIGHT LAW
KNOW THE FACTS!

WHY COPYRIGHT?
Copyright is a set of exclusive rights granted to creators that prohibits others from copying, distributing, adapting or performing their works without permission. These exclusive rights are intended to incentivize creation primarily but also protect the work’s integrity and ensure that credit is given to its creator.

HOW DOES IT WORK?
Anything you create that’s in a fixed and tangible form (written down, recorded, etc.) is copyright protected. On the other hand, facts and ideas are not eligible for copyright protection. In the U.S., registration of copyright or display of the copyright symbol isn’t required.

COPYRIGHT TERMS
The term of copyright is life of the author plus 70 years. If a corporate ("work for hire") or anonymous work, the term is 95 years from its first publication or 120 years from the date of its creation, whichever expires first. The works enter the public domain upon copyright expiration.

PUBLIC DOMAIN AND EXEMPTIONS
When works enter the public domain, they belong to the public and may be used in any manner, with or without attribution. Works produced by government agencies belong to the public and are generally ineligible for copyright protection. Creators may contribute works to the public domain with a Creative Commons CC0 license. U.S. copyright law provides both specific use exemptions (e.g., classroom teaching) as well as a flexible set of fair use guidelines based on the weighing of four factors: purpose of use, nature of work, amount used, and market impact.

OTHER TYPES OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY
Copyright, along with patent and trademark law, is subsumed under a larger umbrella known as intellectual property law. While copyright grants a set of exclusive rights to creators to control a work’s uses, trademarks are designed to protect company names, logos, slogans, etc. and minimize public confusion. Patents protect inventions and give creators a time-limited monopoly on them.